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ABSTRACT

This study is an exploratory research effort dealing specifically with the relationship between six independent variables (number of private schools, city or county school district, metropolitan or nonmetropolitan location of schools, private school affiliation, private school types, existence of social elite enrolled in private schools) and a series of eight attitudinal items tapping public school superintendents' ideas about the return of students to the public school and the social impact of the private academies. The first four of the dependent variables--increased faith in public schools, poor private school facilities, poor quality education in private schools, and increasing tuition costs--deal with why students return to the public schools. The second four--private schools took student overload, private schools provided an outlet for racial tension, private schools made public school officials more aware of needs, and private schools created community-based social tensions--deal with the social impact of private schools. Data for this study were collected from questionnaires mailed to all public school superintendents in Alabama. The data were collected during August, 1975, and a response rate of over 60 percent was achieved. (Author/MLF)

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PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN THE DEEP SOUTH: AN EXAMINATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL OFFICIALS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR SOCIAL IMPACT, GROWTH, AND DECLINE*

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Introduction

Private school development in the past has often been due to religious ideology or social status. However, one might reasonably argue that much of the recent private school development has been a result of a desire for continued racial segregation.

"We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." (Brown vs Board of Education, 1954). With the writing of these words, the American educational system was launched into an era combining struggle, turmoil, and progress covering more than twenty years. Through days of du jure segregation, beyond years of the "freedom of choice" systems, and over countless other racial and political hurdles, the idea of a unitary educational system was becoming, though perhaps slowly, a reality.

In the past decade, however, another factor has threatened to push public education back to the days before Brown: the formation of white academies. These "segregation academies," although initially developed shortly after the Brown decision, began to achieve prominence following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which pressured Southern schools to desegregate (Walden and Cleveland, 1971). The years 1969 and 1970 saw a boom in private school development (Champagne, 1973) as whites reacted strongly to court ordered desegregation throughout the South. As the development of academies increased, signs of the former dual school system returned to haunt educators.

The scope of this study is twofold. Besides assessing private school

growth and development, it is desired here to explore an aspect which has remained secondary in previous research concerning the private school movement. How do public school officials perceive the situation of the academies? What impacts do private academies have and what might cause the demise of the private academy phenomenon?

Literature on this topic has dealt primarily with objective areal studies of private school development focusing particularly on the "overnight" development. Dealing with growth of schools in Mississippi, Palmer (1971) relates development to socioeconomic status. Also concerning growth in Mississippi, Lowry (1973) discusses the academies as a possible stage of educational change and proposes residential integration as a possible solution. Others (Wiles, 1972) (Walden and Cleveland, 1971) have studied not only growth, but also facilities and programs, providing excellent coverage of the wide range of quality which exists between the academies.

This study is an exploratory research effort dealing specifically with the relationship between six independent variables (number of private schools, city or county school district, metropolitan or non-metropolitan location of schools, private school affiliation, private school types, existence of social elite enrolled in private schools) and a series of eight attitudinal items tapping public school superintendents' ideas about the return of students to the public school and the social impact of the private academies.

Data and Methods

Data for this study were collected utilizing the mailed questionnaire technique. The sample consisted of all public school superintendents in the state of Alabama. The data were collected during August, 1975, and a

response rate of over 60 percent was achieved. Therefore we believe that our data are representative of public school superintendents in Alabama. The instrument consisted of an inventory sheet, to accumulate data concerning the extent and type of private school development, 1967-1975, and a series of eight attitudinal items designed to tap information concerning the demise and social impact of private schools. For this analysis we have restricted our sample to those superintendents who reported private school development in their school districts (N = 47). Since this study is exploratory and we are dealing with a sub-sample, we have limited our statistical analysis to the utilization of Yules Q as a measure of association for this article.

All variables included in this analysis have been dichotomized to limit the occurrence of zero cells. The independent variables and their respective categories are listed below:

1.	School district	1 = county	2 = city
2.	School location	1 = in SMSA	2 = not in SMSA
3.	Number of private schools	1 = one	2 = more than one
4.	Social elite in private schools	1 = no	2 = yes
5.	Private school affiliation	1 = church	2 = private
6.	Private school type	1 = elementary	2 = all levels

The dependent variables were all originally in a Likert-like response format (FA, A, U, D, FD). These have been collapsed into agree and disagree (FA + A = A, U + D + FD = D). The following eight items are the dependent variables for this study. The first four deal with why students return to the public schools, and the last four deal with superintendents' attitudes concerning the social impact of private schools:

1.	Increased faith in public schools	1 = agree	2 = disagree

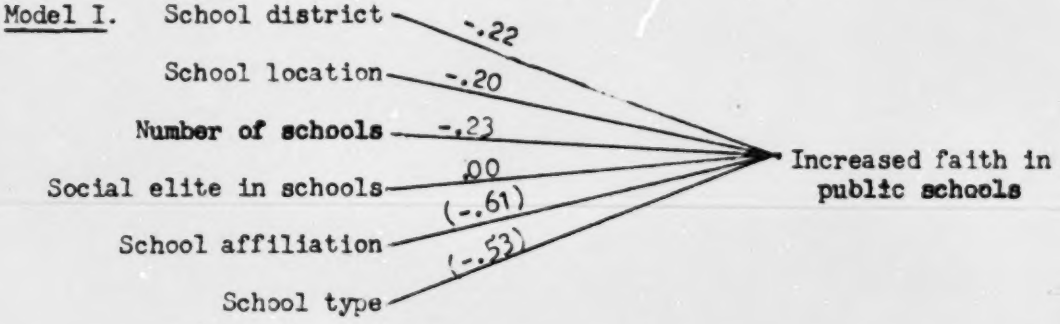
2.	Poor private school facilities	1 = agree 2 = disagree
3.	Poor quality education in private schools	1 = agree 2 = disagree
4.	Increasing tuition costs	1 = agree 2 = disagree
5.	Private schools took student overload	1 = agree 2 = disagree
6.	Private schools provided an outlet for racial tension	1 = agree 2 = disagree
7.	Private schools made public school officials more aware of needs	1 = agree 2 = disagree
8.	Private schools created community-based social tensions	1 = agree 2 = disagree

The data for this study are presented in eight seven-variable models.

Findings

Model I depicts the relationship between the independent variables and school superintendents' attitudes concerning the return of students due to increased faith in the public schools. Of the six independent variables,

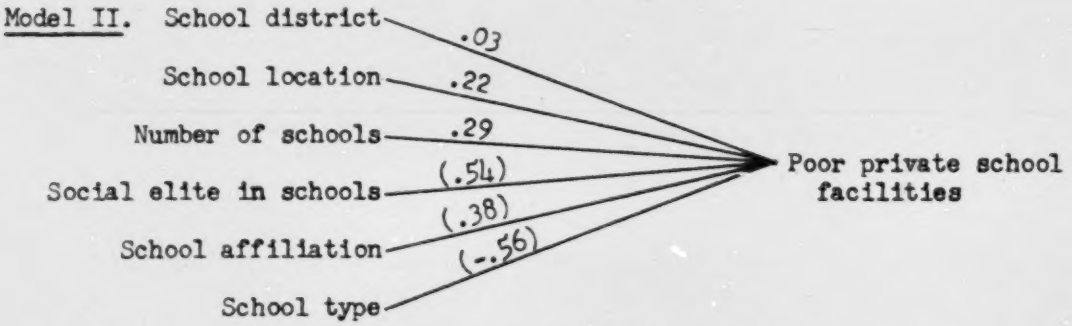
Model I.



only two appear to have meaningful importance ($Q \geq .30$). Both private school affiliation (-.61) and school type (-.53) show strong negative relationships to the dependent variable. In other words, if the private schools are predominantly church related, the public school superintendents are more likely to disagree with the statement that students are returning due to increased faith in the public schools. They are also more likely

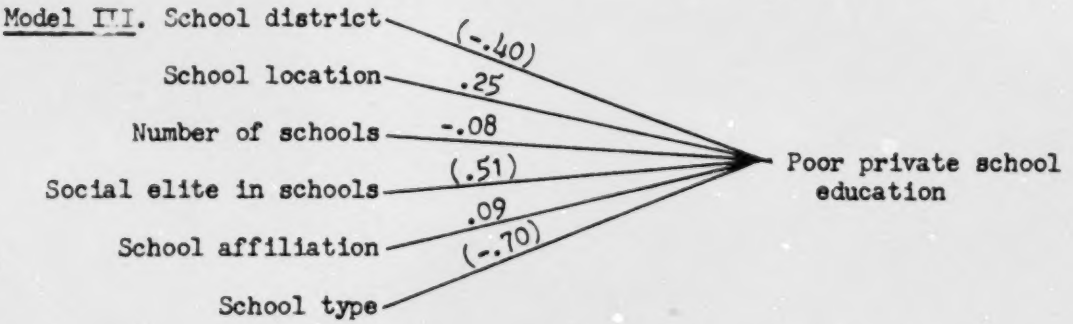
to disagree if the private schools are predominantly elementary schools and not evenly divided among all grade levels.

The second model represents the level of association between the independent variables and the statement that students are returning to the public schools due to poor private school facilities.



Three of the independent variables in Model II meet our criteria for importance. The existence of the social elite in the private schools (.54), private school affiliation (.38), and private school type (-.56) all show reasonably strong relationships. If the social elite are not overly represented in the private schools, the public school officials are more likely to agree that poor private school facilities are responsible for the return of students to the public schools. They are also likely to agree if the private schools are primarily non-church related and if the private schools are representative of all levels.

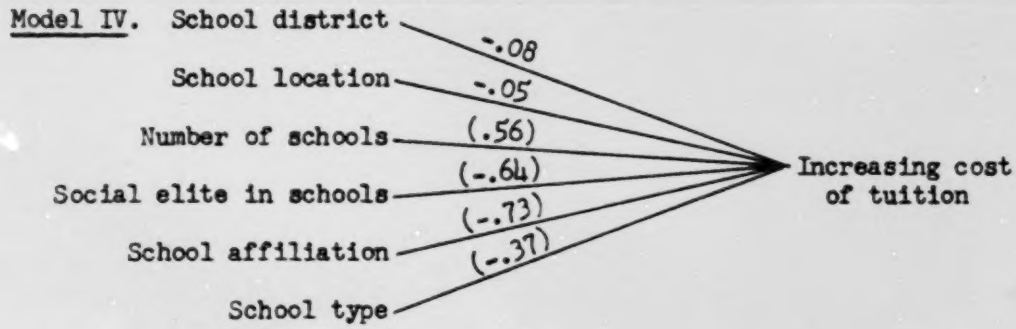
Model III. shows a more marked hierarchy in the importance of the



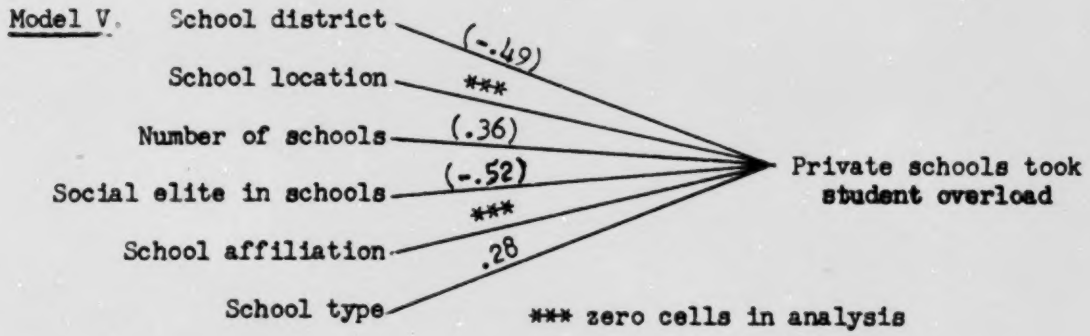
independent variables. School district (-.40) shows a moderately strong

relationship while the existence of social elites is somewhat more important (.51). The most important variable in Model III is private school type (-.70). City school superintendents are more likely to agree that students return because of poor quality education in the private schools. They are also likely to agree if social elites are not in the private schools and if the private schools are representative of all grade levels.

Model IV contains four important independent variables. The number



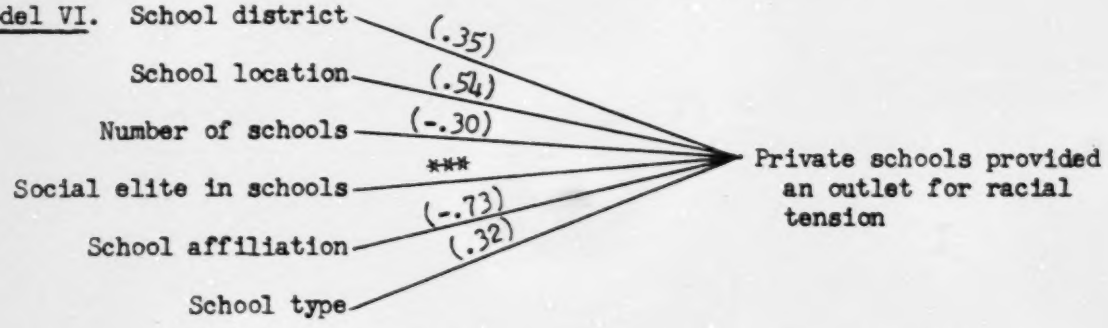
of private schools (.56), the existence of social elites (-.64), private school affiliation, (-.73) and private school type (-.37) are all at least moderately strong. Therefore if there is only one private school and social elites are not over-represented in the private schools, the public school officials are more likely to agree that students are returning due to the increasing cost of tuition. They are also likely to agree if the private schools offer all grade levels and are predominantly not religiously affiliated.



Model V is the first of four models dealing with the social impact of private schools. Three of the variables in Model V meet our importance criteria in relationship to private schools handling student overloads. City school superintendents are more likely to agree that private schools took the overload of students (-.49). They were also inclined to agree where there was only one private school in the district (.36). However, the incidence of social elites in the private school was the most important variable (-.52). If elites were present the public school official was more likely to agree.

All of the independent variables except the presence of social elites were important in Model VI. This model utilized private schools as an

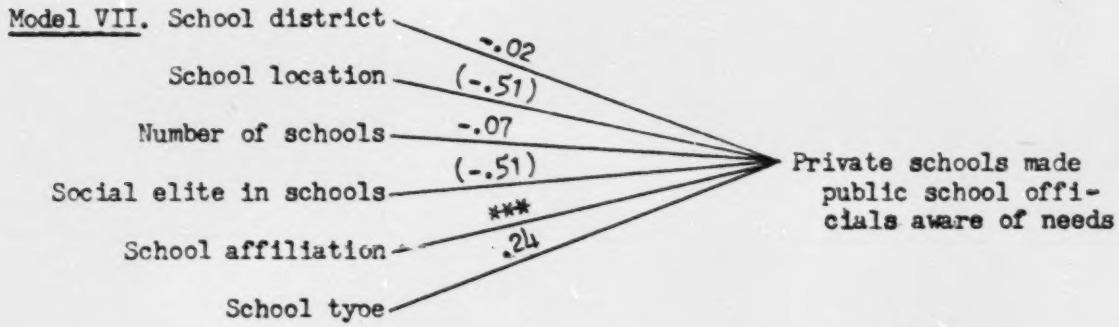
Model VI.



outlet for racial tension as the dependent variable. If the public school official was in a county system (.35), or in an SMSA (.54), they were more likely to agree that private schools acted as an outlet for racial tension. They also agreed if there were more than one private school in the district (-.30). or if the private schools were predominantly not church related (-.73) and primarily elementary (.32). However, school affiliation was certainly the most important variable in this model (-.73).

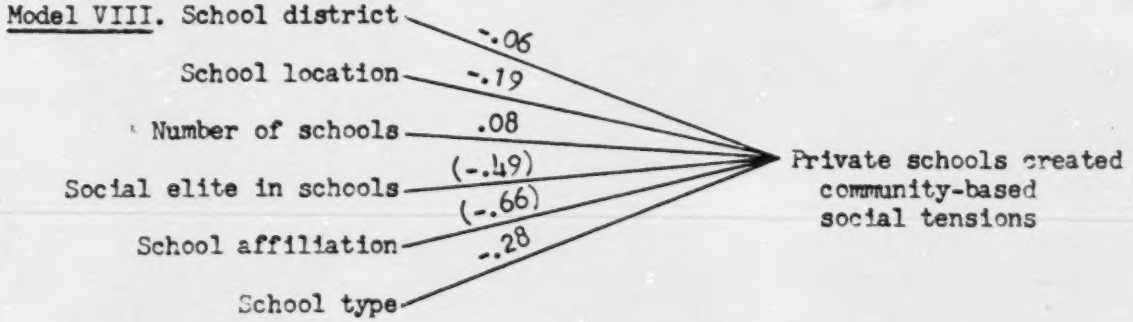
Only two of our independent variables met the criteria of importance in Model VII. This model utilized making public school officials more aware as the dependent variable. Both location of school (-.51) and the

incidence of social elites (-.51) have impact upon the dependent variable. Public school administrators from non-metropolitan areas and those from school districts where the social elite were over-represented tended to



agree that private school development made public school officials more aware of the needs of the students.

Model VIII also had only two important variables. Private schools tend to create social tensions in non-school areas was the dependent for this model. School officials where the social elite were over-represented tended to agree with the statement (-.49) as did those where private



schools were predominantly non-church related (-.66). In this instance private school affiliation was the most important variable.

Conclusions

The first four models, dealing with the decline of private schools, had only one independent variable which met the importance criteria for each model. That was school type. It appears to indicate that public

school officials are less aware of or concerned with private school development when it is limited primarily to the elementary school level. Private school affiliation was important in three of the models. However, in Model II it maintained a positive relationship. The presence of social elites was also found to be important in three of these models. It assumed a negative relationship in Model IV. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings was the lack of importance of the two location variables (county/city and SMSA/NSMSA). Only county/city location was important and that only in Model III.

The last four models, concerned with the social impact of private schools, had only one variable important in three of the models. That was the incidence of social elites. No variables were important in all four models. Private school affiliation, number of private schools, and school district location were important in two models each. The presence of the social elite appears to be the most important variable in reference to all eight models.

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